



Tips on Helping to Bathe Your Loved One with Dementia

Personal hygiene is important for maintaining your loved one's health, such as helping to avoid urinary tract infections, skin infections, and to eliminate odor. Bathing can also be a daily battle for many. Whereas caregivers understand the need for keeping clean, dementia patients may not. Your loved one may not understand the need, see it as being uncomfortable, and leave them feeling vulnerable or even fearful. Thus, bathing becomes a struggle between the resolute caregiver and the determined loved one.

"Caregivers need to be reminded of the 1st golden rule of dementia care: do not reason. Not because your loved one does not want to understand your motives, but because dementia makes reasoning impossible. This is part of their disability."*

Helpful tips:

- Prepare the bathroom: hand held shower attachment; securely fastened grab bars both in the shower/tub and outside of it; a shower-seat; a warm room; non-slip mat in the shower/tub and out; towels, washcloths, liquid soap and shampoo ready; and a warm bathrobe handy. Playing favorite music in the background can help to relax and distract.
- What is the best time for the bath? Think of old habits. When did they use to shower? Did they always take a bath instead of a shower? When is the time of day when your loved one is most relaxed? All can help make bathing easier.
- In the shower, do not start with the head. Make sure water is a warm and gentle stream. Start slowly, give your loved one a washcloth, use simple cueing, be respectful, use a calm voice, and do not rush.
- Offer encouragement and praise.
- Cover them with extra towels when drying and a warm bathrobe when done.
- Compliment how nice they look when the bathing is complete.

If your loved one is still uncooperative:

- Alternate showers/bathing with a partial sponge bath during the week.
- Have the hair washed separately at the sink or at the hair stylist.
- Hire a home health aide with the training and experience to come and bathe your loved one.

Taking your time, patience, and preparation can make bathing your loved one easier.

**Battle of the Bathing*, by Luciana Cramer, Care Specialist Alzheimer's Assoc. California Central Chapter